UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.510
15 October 1996

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 510th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 8 October 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SKOGMO (Norway)

CONTENTS

ANNUAL THEME: THE PURSUIT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTIONS (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Executive Committee will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.96-02968 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania), Mr. Skogmo (Norway), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

ANNUAL THEME: THE PURSUIT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTIONS (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/863, 867 and 872)

1. Mr. NARAY (Hungary) said that the international community had had to cope with additional waves of refugees in the past year, but the huge number of victims of previous conflicts had not been offered durable solutions. As the leading agency to coordinate international humanitarian and refugee assistance, UNHCR had succeeded in fulfilling its tasks with remarkable efficiency. Hungary welcomed UNHCR reforms to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability, and greatly appreciated Project Delphi and the Action Plan prepared by the Change Management Group.

2. His country continued to give shelter to thousands of people fleeing war, ethnic cleansing, persecution and intimidation. It was firmly committed to international cooperation for the protection of refugees and was aware of the increased importance of prevention, early warning and assistance-capacity building. Hungary had a long tradition of providing shelter for persecuted people of different origins. In the late 1980s, when many thousands of refugees from Romania had applied for assistance, and in the early 1990s, when it had received several waves of refugees from the former Yugoslavia, the Government and Hungarian society had succeeded in finding the best possible solutions in a strained economic situation. With the help of UNHCR, an effective institutional framework of assistance had been established, offering safe accommodation for more than 140,000 persons, including 75,000 temporarily protected people from the former Yugoslavia. Six thousand of the latter still enjoyed temporary protection in Hungary.

3. After five years of conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, there appeared to be a real possibility for a lasting peace. The settlement of refugees should avoid endangering the survival of any ethnic community and ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all citizens, including minorities. Further efforts were needed to rebuild infrastructures and establish and strengthen democratic institutions in the post-election period.

4. Voluntary repatriation was still the preferred solution, but when it was not feasible local settlement of refugees in the asylum country might be considered, even on a temporary basis. In such cases asylum countries stood in need of international solidarity and burden-sharing. Hungary was closely cooperating in the safe and secure return of refugees to their places of origin. UNHCR and IOM had been providing significant assistance to the Hungarian authorities in organizing the return of refugees from the former Yugoslavia or in their resettlement in third countries, primarily Canada, the United States of America and Australia. The Canadian programme was under way and the Government of the United States had indicated its readiness to resettle more refugees. Since the previous autumn, more

than 1,200 refugees from the former Yugoslavia, mainly Bosnians, had been resettled from Hungary to third countries, and approximately 1,000 persons had returned home voluntarily.

5. In 1997, the Government would be allocating financial resources for the care and maintenance of refugees living in collective centres and assistance for those privately accommodated. UNHCR's financial contribution in 1996 had served principally to complement the weekly allowance distributed through local communities to privately accommodated refugees. UNHCR had also offered grants to refugees wanting to set up their own small businesses, but the project had had limited success owing to a lack of real interest among the refugees. UNHCR and the Hungarian authorities were seeking new ways to keep up the refugees' motivation to become self-sufficient. At the same time, his country had proposed that the partly unused UNHCR funds should be channelled to the care and maintenance of refugees living in collective centres.

6. Hungary was also interested in speeding up the full integration of persons who had been granted refugee status, who were offered rights equal to those of Hungarian nationals. Hungary, the first country in its region to accede, in 1989, to the 1951 Geneva Convention, was committed to lifting the geographical limitation which excluded non-Europeans from submitting applications for refugee status to the Hungarian authorities, and such an arrangement had been made in a recently-prepared refugee bill. Implementation of the new comprehensive refugee law would be in keeping with European standards and require the continued presence of UNHCR officials and experts in Hungary.

7. October 1996 marked the fortieth anniversary of the October 1956 revolution in Hungary, the suppression of which had led to a major refugee crisis in Europe. On that anniversary, he wished to pay tribute to UNHCR and other international organizations, private individuals and countries for their assistance to 200,000 Hungarian refugees. Since 1956, Hungary had required no explanations of why the international community needed UNHCR and why citizens had to be alive to the fate of refugees.

8. Ms. AROCHA (Venezuela) welcomed the reference in paragraph 3 of document A/AC.96/872 to the link between international protection and the search for durable solutions. On that point, her Government agreed that international protection should continue to be one of UNHCR's basic functions, as stated in its 1950 Statute.

9. While she commended UNHCR for its work in Central America through CIREFCA, in regard to voluntary repatriation she would draw attention to the observation in paragraph 11 of document A/AC.96/872 that voluntary repatriation was not always a feasible solution and that long-term situations were better served by other solutions such as local integration and resettlement. Case-by-case and regional studies were required to determine the best solution for the refugees, and the recent local integration agreement concluded between the Governments of Mexico and Guatemala was a promising example.

10. The key to all work for refugees was voluntary repatriation accompanied by protection of refugees, when minimally favourable conditions for return to

countries of origin were met. Clearly, it must be linked with reintegration, reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. She agreed about the circumstances that had reduced the scope for local integration initiatives, which included declining overseas development aid and limited resources for refugee aid and development, and about the need for the international community to develop viable assistance strategies. Her delegation also supported UNHCR's efforts to strengthen its training and institution-building activities throughout the world.

11. Despite progress in the pursuit of solutions, serious refugee problems such as that occurring in the Great Lakes region of Africa had not been resolved. As document A/AC.96/871 stated, that might be due to the lack of a comprehensive approach to resolving refugee problems, an approach that would include both countries of origin, countries of asylum and the regional and global international community.

12. Her Government appreciated the expansion of the UNHCR office in Caracas, which was fitting recognition of Venezuela's provision, throughout its life as a Republic, of refuge, asylum and protection to tens of thousands of human beings of the most diverse origins.

13. Mr. [illegible] (United Republic of Tanzania) said that there was a relatively stable political situation in Rwanda, but the situation in Burundi was still potentially volatile. As the traditional country of asylum for refugees from both countries, Tanzania was faced with a planning dilemma while it prepared for the repatriation of Rwandan refugees on the northern side. Burundian refugees continued to enter on the southern side of the same border.

14. Although Tanzania had learned to cope with refugees since her birth as a nation in 1961, the current massive incursions had caused tremendous destruction to the surrounding environment, increased the insecurity of the Tanzanian people and been a political as well as social burden on the Government. He appreciated the efforts made by UNHCR and other international agencies, but much remained to be done to alleviate the refugees' suffering and ease the burden on their hosts.

15. His Government was extremely disappointed that, despite improvements in the situation, refugees had not been returning to Rwanda. That was primarily a result of massive intimidation in the camps, and the status quo could not be allowed to continue. As part of its efforts to reach a durable solution, his Government had established an "intimidators camp", in order to separate intimidators from genuine refugees and allow repatriation to proceed smoothly. Any intimidators involved in the planning and execution of the genocide, if identified, would be handed over to the International Tribunal on Rwanda, while the rest would have their refugee status withdrawn and be handed over to the Rwandan Government. It would not be an easy task, especially as the intimidators included soldiers of the former Rwandan Army and possessed weapons.

16. Present international norms and principles regulating refugee matters placed heavy responsibilities on countries of asylum, yet remained virtually

silent on the role and responsibilities of the countries of origin. Existing practice must be reviewed in order to oblige refugee-producing countries themselves to address the root causes of refugee flows. Refugees, too, must be made aware of the need to respect the laws and regulations of the countries of asylum and to maintain cordial relations with local populations.

17. The crisis in Burundi had continued to deteriorate and threatened to engulf the entire region in a new cycle of violence creating a fresh wave of refugees. To forestall that eventuality, and as part of the pursuit of durable solutions, his Government had taken an active role in bringing the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, under the mediation of former President Julius Nyerere, in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity and other interested parties. Unfortunately, the military coup of 25 July 1996 had undermined efforts to promote dialogue and restore peace and had necessitated the imposition of economic sanctions on Burundi. In addition, the perpetrators of gross violations of human rights continued to enjoy impunity. The time had come for the international community to begin to seek ways to bring those criminals to justice, to end impunity and seek durable solutions along the model of the International Tribunal on Rwanda. He hoped that the sanctions would secure the compliance of the military rulers and enable the leaders of Burundi to eschew violence as a means of arriving at durable solutions to the cause of the exodus of refugees.

18. He wished to express his appreciation to UNHCR, European Union member countries, the Government of Japan and the United States Government, which had provided moral support to Tanzania in dealing with its refugee problems. Lastly, his Government was not considering granting permanent residence or offering resettlement to refugees. It would continue to accept genuine asylum seekers, but expected them to go home when conditions in the country of origin returned to normal.

19. Mr. MOHAFA (Lesotho) reaffirmed Lesotho's support for UNHCR's endeavours. Efforts to promote the number of female staff in senior management positions, in particular, were a positive step to address the plight of refugee women and children.

20. Lesotho would always stand ready to receive all bona fide fugitives from the scourge of political persecution and harassment in their countries of origin. While the world was experiencing a welcome recognition of democratic rule, it would be naïve to underestimate the enemies of peace and violators of human rights. On the African continent, the events in Rwanda had been the most disturbing, and he deplored the senseless killings and the human suffering. Hopefully, the special UNHCR emergency programmes in support of Rwandan refugees would one day bring peace and stability to that area.

21. Lesotho had always practised a policy of full integration of refugees in its social fabric, which benefited both Lesotho, through enhanced economic assistance, and the refugees themselves. It had experienced some problems in the early 1980s regarding the refugees' continued safety, due to South Africa's perception of them as a security threat. The number of refugees had decreased substantially, however, after the peaceful transition to democratic rule in South Africa.

22. On independence, Lesotho had lacked an infrastructural, industrial or employment base and its resource base was virtually non-existent, despite the Government's efforts to restructure the economy. Approximately 60 per cent of Lesotho's gross national product was from income remitted by migrant workers employed in South African mines, and nearly all of the remainder from the Southern African Customs Union receipts. Despite those and other well-known factors, Lesotho remained committed to the alleviation of the plight of refugees in southern Africa. Although Lesotho was experiencing a lull in asylum-seeking, it believed in staying prepared, alert and up to date, for which it needed to be given the necessary means. It intended to bring its Refugee Act and other related legislation into line with international legal instruments.

23. Mr. SEMBEREKA (Malawi) said that Malawi, a very small country, had managed almost 1.1 million Mozambican refugees with the able assistance of UNHCR and the donor community. For the entire period of their stay in Malawi, the Mozambican refugees had been afforded all forms of protection and had enjoyed the same rights and freedoms as their Malawian counterparts. The Mozambican refugee programme in Malawi had also provided an example of the effectiveness of durable solutions. After the signing of the Peace Accords on 4 October 1992, voluntary repatriation had been organized and almost all Mozambicans had returned home in two and a half years instead of the three years originally planned. That success had been due to the harmonious partnership between the Malawi Government and the UNHCR branch office on the one hand and the Mozambican Government on the other, which had cooperated through the Tripartite Commission established to that end. Their efforts had been complemented by a group of hard-working non-governmental organizations and, most importantly, the involvement of the refugees themselves in making their decision to return home.

24. Another durable solution was integration. At the Committee's forty-sixth session, his delegation had reported the existence of a group of some 9,000 Mozambican refugees who had become self-sufficient and opted to remain in Malawi. His Government was in the process of determining the status of those groups who had remained behind after the end of the programme.

25. Effective durable solutions required the full cooperation and participation in decision-making of the intended recipients, the refugees themselves. Malawi was now receiving considerable influxes of refugees from the Great Lakes region and their statements revealed that their movements were being forced on them. Those movements were simply a shifting of the burden from one country to another and he called on the Executive Committee to find rapid solutions to curb the transfer of that burden to Malawi, which was still grappling with the environmental deterioration caused by its 10-year hosting of 1.1 million Mozambicans.

26. Undoubtedly, the most effective durable solution was conflict prevention. It was incumbent upon any State or Government to prevent a civil war or other serious consequences that might force refugees across its borders. While that matter might not fall within its mandate, UNHCR could play a catalytic role as omnipresent strategic observer at the grass-roots level in areas of conflict.

27. Malawi applauded the initiation of a dialogue between UNHCR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on population movements, most of which were illegal migration from other parts of the continent. It hoped that solutions would be found to curb such movements and would appreciate action by the Executive Committee to discuss and issue policy directions in that connection.

28. As Malawi had stated at the previous session despite the refugees' successful return to Mozambique, Malawi still needed action on activities pertaining to environmental damage caused by a large number of refugees. He would like again to request the Executive Committee's assistance in soliciting donor support for Malawi's rehabilitation programme. He thanked the ACP-EU Joint Assembly for registering that concern in its resolution on the situation of refugees in ACP countries, adopted by the Assembly on 20 March 1996. In that context, he conveyed his Government's appreciation to UNHCR for agreeing with BMZ Germany that unspent funds of over $600,000 from the refugee programme in Malawi should still be used in Malawi on rehabilitation of roads and forests in refugee-impacted areas.

29. Mr. BRUUN (Denmark) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made on the previous day by the delegate for Ireland on behalf of the European Union.

30. Most other speakers had dealt with the challenges of repatriation, which repatriation was indeed the preferred durable solution to refugee problems and the way to sustainable development. However, local integration was another possible solution, and positive experiences in a number of countries, including Denmark, lent support for the call made in document A/AC.96/872, paragraphs 12 and 13, for the international community to reassess its potential. Denmark supported the continued use of resettlement as a last resort and a durable solution in situations where refugees were unable to repatriate, where local integration was not feasible and protection unavailable in the asylum country. Nevertheless, the possibility of increasing the very limited number of countries providing that option needed to be explored. Currently, only 10 countries had established quotas for resettlement, one being Denmark which offered 500 resettlement places annually. For that reason, he concurred with the assertion in paragraph 15 of document A/AC.96/872 about the need to increase the number of countries offering resettlement opportunities. Denmark also strongly supported the statement in paragraph 16 of the same document regarding UNHCR's commitment to exploring regional resettlement solutions to refugee problems which would be less expensive, less disruptive for the refugee family, and more promising in terms of eventual voluntary repatriation. That solution might well be feasible, especially if combined with assistance from the international community.

31. One of the options under active discussion in Denmark was the possibility to convert, in accordance with the High Commissioner's protection mandate, a limited number of the very expensive resettlement places offered outside the region into less expensive, but consequently more numerous, resettlement places within the region. In line with that regional approach, his country would further encourage UNHCR and Governments to look into the possibilities

of establishing burden-sharing arrangements at the regional level to provide the most efficient international protection and make sure that countries were not overburdened, especially in situations of mass influx.

32. While moral, political and diplomatic support for durable solutions was important, financial support for UNHCR was indispensable. The High Commissioner had appealed for a special effort to meet UNHCR's financial needs in operations in the former Yugoslavia, West Africa and in the Great Lakes region. In all those operations UNHCR was vigorously pursuing durable solutions and it would be appropriate if some of the moral and political support for such solutions was matched by financial contributions. It was particularly gratifying to announce that, subject to parliamentary approval, Denmark would make an extra contribution to UNHCR of US$ 16 million, thus bringing its combined contribution in 1996 to the record level of US$ 55 million. The bulk of Denmark's contributions would be to some of the operations highlighted by the High Commissioner, and earmarking would be as broad as possible so as to allow UNHCR maximum operational flexibility. The contribution he had just announced included an allocation covering 25 per cent of the Initiative Fund for Refugee Women. He was confident that in addressing the needs of refugee women UNHCR would go beyond the establishment of what was a relatively small fund. The international community had not only a humanitarian obligation to refugee women: it should also see them as a resource without which solutions were unlikely to be durable. There was every reason to implement the guidelines on assistance to women refugees as well as the many recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

33. Ms. GHOSE (India) said that several new challenges had confronted UNHCR in the year since the Executive Committee's previous session. The problem of refugees and population displacement had become one of global magnitude and seriousness comparable to other transboundary problems such as environmental degradation, drug trafficking and terrorism. Although the enormity of the challenge it posed to the world was well recognized, solutions to many refugee problems seemed increasingly distant. The most urgent task facing the international community was to identify realistic, feasible and durable solutions in the light of the specific constraints faced by developing asylum countries.

34. There were three disturbing trends in the global problem of refugees. First of all, developing countries continued to bear the brunt of refugee flows; they hosted large refugee and migrant populations which overwhelmed them and diverted their scarce resources and energies from their prime responsibility of meeting their own development needs. In addition, social, economic and ethnic tensions unleashed by the presence of refugees in areas where life was a perpetual struggle had led to widespread demands for borders to be closed, yet the impossibility of ignoring the desperate needs of innocent civilians fleeing conflict produced a cruel dilemma. Secondly, a high degree of aid fatigue was apparent, as well as an increase in restrictive practices that circumscribed the right to asylum. Such restrictive practices might be attributable to the growing intolerance and racism engendered by economic problems. Unfortunately, hapless refugees from different cultures were the first victims. The problem had to be handled in accordance with the norms of international protection. Thirdly, the lines between political

refugees and economic migrants were becoming more and more blurred. Contemporary refugee movements were taking place against a backdrop of larger and more complex migratory flows, and the arrival of genuine refugees often led to the development of a "pull factor" bringing in large numbers of fresh economic migrants. Still others understandably moved in search of a livelihood, while former political refugees settled in countries of asylum, laid down roots and became reluctant to return to their countries of origin, even after the elimination of the factors that had led to their departure.

35. Accordingly, the question was how to pursue and implement durable solutions and whether it was even possible to identify them. It had been remarked that durable solutions first and foremost required the will to recognize and deal with root causes. However, it could not be UNHCR's task alone to look into them, although it could play a significant role in identifying potential sources of refugee outflows. The international community must show a clear commitment to facilitating the creation of conditions in countries of origin to permit refugees to return safely and with dignity, securely to anchor them there and to discourage further outflows. As in the case of the returnees to Mozambique, return and reintegration programmes could aim at a seamless transition by dovetailing developmental approaches into the relief stage itself and providing for a relief-development continuum.

36. Voluntary repatriation was the best course, yet she agreed with UNHCR that local integration and resettlement should remain in the catalogue of durable solutions. Nevertheless, the scope for local integration was circumscribed by the burden already imposed by the massive presence of refugees and the impact of declining international aid. In an age of multi-culturalism and pluralism, ethnic and cultural ties need not influence decisions on local integration and regional resettlement. A mere 30,000 refugees had been accepted for resettlement by the developed countries during 1995, in contrast to the millions who had been offered refuge by developing countries. Resettlement should not be seen solely through the narrow prism of compliance by first asylum countries with international norms. It should also be seen from the perspective of international burden-sharing.

37. The issue of economic migration, with its effects on public attitudes towards genuine political refugees, could not be ignored, and highlighted the need for long-term sustainable development in the countries of origin. Emergency relief invariably evoked a response from donors, often at the cost of long-term development assistance, thereby perpetuating a vicious circle by creating conditions for potential conflict over scarce resources. Humanitarian action could become a spur for long-term development if durable solutions were to be found. She endorsed the proposal to include the socio-economic impact of refugee situations on developing countries as a specific agenda item in the Standing Committee's programme of work for the coming year.

38. Her delegation understood the concepts of "comprehensive approaches" and "prevention" to mean the commitment of the international community at large, involving a whole range of actors, including countries of origin and asylum, regional arrangements such as the Organization of African Unity and the spectrum of United Nations agencies and NGOs working in the relevant areas.

She applauded the success of UNHCR in developing arrangements such as the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), and the CIS Conference, but conflict resolution per se was outside its mandate, as UNHCR itself recognized. None the less, her delegation was following with interest the new initiative launched by the High Commissioner in the Central Asian, South West Asia and Middle East regions.

39. Prevention remained primarily the responsibility of States themselves, but UNHCR had an important "lighthouse" function to play in alerting the international community to imminent refugee flows. Many complaints had been voiced about the so-called "CNN effect" - the sudden attention focused on a situation followed by equally sudden withdrawal of international interest. The power of the media should be used to bolster UNHCR's early warnings. Moreover, UNHCR's activities in countries of origin, through community development projects and monitoring the welfare of returnees, as well as its specific involvement in Integrated Development Projects, could also discourage outflows.

40. Developing countries should be actively involved in devising methodological frameworks and strategies for durable solutions. The possibility of sharing South-South experience in relief activities should be scrutinized and it should be recognized that the expertise of developing countries could be more relevant to the conditions obtaining in the majority of sending and receiving countries. UNHCR's policies, management style and the composition of its staff should reflect not only the global nature of refugee concerns but also the universal support the Office enjoyed.

41. India's experience of coping with major refugee situations dated back to the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, when over 8 million refugees from the areas which had become Pakistan and Bangladesh had moved into India, where they were now successfully integrated. In the late 1950s there had been a major inflow of Tibetan refugees who continued to live in India, where the Government offered them facilities to maintain their cultural characteristics and identity. In the early 1970s India had provided refuge to some 10 million refugees before Bangladesh had been born - perhaps the largest single movement of refugees ever. Recent decades had been marked by inflows of Tamils, Iranians, Chakmas and Afghans.

42. India's experience in handling refugee situations was the foundation for its refugee policy, based on political solutions achieved where feasible through bilateral negotiations with the countries of origin. Most refugees in India received national treatment and were permitted to integrate into the mainstream if they so wished, a fact that was often ignored. The only restraints India imposed on refugees were respect for its laws and a prohibition on engaging in political activities.

43. Her delegation was concerned about recent reports that refugees from a UNHCR camp in a neighbouring country were leaving the camp and moving to India. She urged the Office to take action to rectify the situation and make sure that the refugees received the protection to which they were entitled. Most population flows into India were "mixed" in character and included hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants whose arrival had become an issue of major concern. UNHCR's experience in the recently concluded CPA in

South-East Asia and elsewhere was being seriously studied by India, whose society was also developing ideas and comprehensive approaches to refugee and migrant issues which, might provide a valuable input in the pursuit of durable solutions. UNHCR's plan for promotional activities in India consisted of a viable means of raising public awareness of refugee's concerns. UNHCR, whose inherent qualities made it the natural leader in the refugee field, should act as the catalyst in the search for innovative solutions to the infinitely complex problems of refugees.

44. Mr. GIORGIS (Observer for Eritrea) said that an estimated 700,000 Eritreans, 500,000 of whom lived in the Sudan, had been forced to flee their country during the 30-year war of liberation. The reasons for their flight had been eliminated with the end of hostilities in 1991.

45. Since the declaration of a sovereign State in Eritrea, the Government had been striving to find a permanent solution to the refugee problem, as part of its domestic and external policy of promoting peace and stability. It had taken as its prime task the creation of conditions for a durable solution to refugee problems as an important factor in fostering regional security and stability and the economic progress of the countries affected by the problem. Its commitment was evidenced by its efforts to foster regional cooperation and prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in the subregion.

46. The smooth reintegration of Eritreans in the Diaspora had been a priority concern for the Government of Eritrea, for which the safety and restoration of the shattered livelihoods of its citizens was both a political principle and a moral obligation. The Government appreciated the diversity of problems Eritrean refugees had had to face in exile and recognized that repatriation should be based on free choice. Accordingly, it had made it legally permissible for any Eritrean refugee to acquire dual citizenship and had taken the exceptional step of extending to Eritrean refugees in the Diaspora the right to vote in the referendum which had decided the destiny of their home country. It also allowed them to visit their country freely and offered special tax exemptions and other benefits when they returned. In addition, it had prepared a programme of assistance for their voluntary repatriation and reintegration and was committed to observing the universal and fundamental human rights instruments.

47. While it was attentive to the needs of Eritrean refugees everywhere, the Government accorded top priority to the plight of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan, on account of the immense social, political and economic hardship they had so long endured. Although the fraternal hospitality of the Sudanese people would be remembered, it was no secret that the refugees had suffered maltreatment, restrictions and abuse by the authorities. Hence, the only alternative for the Eritrean refugees was organized voluntary repatriation. Although the Eritrean refugees in the Sudan had repeatedly asserted their readiness for voluntary repatriation, and the Government of Eritrea fully supported their desire, progress was still obstructed by the host country, and the majority of the Eritrean refugees were still stranded in Sudanese refugee settlements.

48. On 16 April 1994, the Government of Eritrea had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR to prepare the way for the Office to protect, promote and facilitate of the repatriation and reintegration of the Eritrean refugees from the Sudan. A similar agreement had been concluded on 6 September 1994 between UNHCR and the Government of Sudan. However, while the pilot project had been under way in 1995, the Sudanese authorities had obstructed the process, in violation of the fundamental principles governing the basic human rights of refugees and in contravention of their obligation to cooperate with UNHCR. Subsequently, the Sudanese authorities had hampered the process and their conduct towards the Eritrean refugees had been characterized by deplorable atrocities, illegal detention, torture and other abuses. Thousands of refugees who had attempted to return spontaneously had been stopped by the Sudanese security forces, which had stolen their possessions and raped women. Their patience exhausted, over 140,000 Eritreans had spontaneously returned from the Sudan without security or legal protection. His delegation was also concerned about the denial of food rations and other basic services to the refugees remaining in the Sudan. His Government had brought the widespread human rights abuses to the attention of UNHCR, whose offices in Eritrea had been called upon to conduct interviews with the arriving returnees and to witness the evidence of their suffering.

49. The welfare of some 300,000 Eritrean refugees was endangered by the failure of the Sudanese authorities to comply with fundamental humanitarian principles and by their refusal to respect the agreement reached with UNHCR. The international community, and particularly UNHCR, had a legal and moral responsibility to protect collective universal humanitarian principles from violation by any of its member States. The Eritrean refugees in the Sudan were entitled to repatriate voluntarily and to resume normal life. The Government of Eritrea urged the Executive Committee to adopt tangible measures to prevent the Eritrean refugees from becoming the victims of the political and economic objectives of a host government and to permit the resumption of orderly repatriation. It also called on UNHCR and the international community and other concerned agencies to increase their assistance to the programme of voluntary repatriation and reintegration, which was both the durable solution to the sufferings of the Eritrean refugees in the Sudan and a major contribution to regional peace, stability and social and economic progress.

50. The allegation that the Government of Eritrea was selectively discriminating against different social groups and political factions among the refugees was entirely baseless. His Government believed that the solution to the problem of the Eritrean refugees would contribute to the search for durable solutions, although in its experience return of refugees to their country of origin had been hampered by problems created by their host country.

51. Mrs. BAUTISTA (Philippines) said that the right of persons to return to their countries and the responsibility of States to accept the return and reintegration of their nationals must be reiterated. In addition to UNHCR's important role in prevention through its extensive network of field offices, the international community could adopt preventive actions that were beyond UNHCR's mandate.

52. The Philippines would continue to fulfil its commitments and responsibilities under the 1951 Convention. It had also participated in the negotiation and implementation of the CPA, assuming more responsibilities than was to be expected. Since the conclusion of the CPA, her country had continued to provide shelter to the residual Vietnamese population, comprising 52 refugees and 1,910 non-refugees. It would continue to coordinate with concerned Governments, particularly the countries of resettlement and the country of origin, in identifying and implementing durable solutions for the residual Vietnamese in the country.

53. The viable solution was resettlement of recognized refugees, the repatriation of those classified as non-refugees and their reintegration in their country of origin. There was no existing national legal framework, nor did her Government have the means, for the continued stay in the country of the residual Vietnamese following the expiration of the CPA. Hence, local integration was not an option. With respect to the 350 Vietnamese brought to the country by the United States under the orderly departure programme, the countries concerned must reach an agreement for a durable solution. Those who had brought them to the Philippines must take responsibility for them.

54. Ms. LOPES MAIATO (Observer for Angola) said that 20 months had passed since the signing of the Lusaka Protocol, and the deadlines for implementing its provisions had not yet been fully observed. Implementation had been characterized by repeated failures to comply on the part of the national Union for the Total Independence of Angola UNITA, which was deliberately delaying the process. Her Government was fully committed to redoubling efforts so that the Lusaka Protocol could be applied in its entirety.

55. Repatriation of the Angolan refugees in neighbouring countries, who currently numbered 311,000, was one of her Government's priorities. Despite the delays in implementing the Lusaka Protocol, and although peace was not yet a reality in Angola, the refugee population in neighbouring countries had begun to return by their own means, as they were tired of living in exile for more than three decades. They were returning in large numbers; by August 1996 alone, some 12,000 had returned, and by year-end that figure was expected to be 15,000. In 1995, 13,100 refugees had returned, and the remaining refugees' anxiousness to come home could well be imagined. The organized repatriation programme had been due to start in August 1996, but because of the delays in implementing the peace process, it had been postponed until 1997. Free movement of people and goods was one of the conditions without which it would not be possible to start the programme.

56. Conditions had been created for the reception and resettlement of Angola refugees living in Zambia in the Moxico Province. A programme to de-mine the main roads in that province and in the refugees' areas of origin was being carried out. An anti-personnel mine awareness campaign for the local population was also under way, and the Government intended to sensitize the refugees in the camps in Zambia and Zaire.

57. The population of the Cabinda Province, which had sought refuge in neighbouring Congo and Zaire, had started its spontaneous return to its areas of origin, and hence there was a need to rehabilitate the basic infrastructure, such as schools, health posts and water systems. Tripartite

agreements had been signed between Angola, UNHCR and Zambia, Namibia and Zaire. A tripartite agreement with the Congo would be signed shortly. In view of the situation and her country's serious budgetary constraints, Angola appealed strongly to the international community to continue its assistance.

58. Mr. EPHRAIM (Observer for Rwanda) pleaded for immediate steps to be taken to break the prevailing stalemate in refugee repatriation, and also called for responsible countries to make concerted efforts to end the hostage-terrorist situation that had been a feature of the Rwandan refugee problem for the past two years. Two years ago, the 6.5 million persons currently in Rwanda had been either internally or externally displaced, but were finally all in their homes. His Government therefore saw no rationale for the continued exile of 1.3 to 1.5 million Rwandans in Zaire and the United Republic of Tanzania. There was also no rationale for continuing to grant asylum and refugee status to the exiles, because the conditions under which blanket territorial asylum had been provided in 1994 had long since ceased to exist. In any case, there had been enough reasons at that time to justify non-application of the OAU Convention, under which most of the persons concerned had been granted asylum, for large numbers of political leaders, militia and former military personnel had committed crimes against humanity and been guilty of serious non-political crimes and acts contrary to the purposes of the OAU and the United Nations before they had entered their present countries of asylum.

59. At that time, UNHCR and concerned countries should have guided the international community in preventing such persons from benefiting from refugee status. Failure to do so had bred the current problems of exported genocide and continued hostage-taking of an innocent population. The persons who had committed genocide were now posing as the victims of an unfair system in Rwanda.

60. At the Committee's 509th meeting, the representative of Zaire had fearlessly asserted, contrary to the truth, and also to universal surprise, that the exiled population in his country had escaped ethnic cleansing in Rwanda. Such a statement was not only cynical but immoral and irresponsible. Rwanda did not consider the continuous pumping of resources by the international community into refugee camps a justifiable act, especially when the camps were the sources not only of terror to Rwandans wishing to return and to international humanitarian workers in the camps, but also of insecurity for Rwandan nationals living close to the Rwandan borders, especially to the west, near eastern Zaire. Furthermore, those camps were the main centres for the ethnic cleansing currently taking place in the Kivu province of eastern Zaire, which had started in northern Kivu and was also occurring in southern Kivu, in the Marungu Province.

61. It had also been asserted at the previous meeting that private and public property had been taken to Zaire and was being held by the Government, despite appeals for it to be returned. The necessary judicial instruments were now in place, and trials for those accused of genocide would proceed shortly. Large numbers of those outside the country had committed genocide, and it was only fair that they should return to Rwanda and receive justice. A recent law on punishment for genocide made provision for pleas of pardon, but they would apply on an individual basis and only to those people who placed themselves within the reach of justice - in other words, they must return to Rwanda.

62. Rwanda had been asked to meet its obligations under the Bujumbura plan of action, and it had met them all. He therefore urgently requested the other parties to that plan to comply with what was demanded of them. The refugee situation would continue to be hopeless unless serious concrete steps were taken to dismantle and destroy the genocidal evil forces that controlled the camps and thwarted repatriation efforts. The camp leadership structures, as well as the camps themselves, should at all costs be dismantled without further delay.

63. Again, the "cessation clause" would comprehensively apply to all persons who had fled as a result of the events of 1994. Once that had been done, the countries of asylum should take the actions deemed necessary to handle those affected. Whether they were currently being screened for asylum status or whether they were expatriated, the Rwandan Government was prepared to receive them. The Great Lakes region, especially Rwanda, should not be made the experimental field of mercy, a test of conventions and humanitarianism, while a blind eye was turned to the continued acts of criminals in the camps, out of fear that innocent refugees would be hurt. After applying the cessation clause, an interim period of only six months should be allowed, during which relief supplies could be provided, but under very strong control. Thereafter, the camps should cease to exist, at least those close to the Rwandan borders. His Government strongly supported the call by the United States for specific steps to break the status quo in the refugee camps, but regretted that some agencies and countries were tactically trying to derail that move and prolong the hopelessness of the situation.

64. If the countries concerned opted to relocate the camps, and not to repatriate the exiled population, then a framework for relocation should be developed and a time-frame defined. Although his Government did not think it viable to move the refugees elsewhere, such a course would avoid repeating the past experience of stating aims without defining actions and actors. The role of the specific donor countries should be spelt out in developing the action plan or framework, which would clarify who would do what, how and when. The relocation should make sure that the exiled persons were no longer a source of conflict between the countries in the region.

65. As to the "pull strategy" that proposed locating supplies inside Rwanda, his Government would cooperate on the necessary logistical arrangements. That, however, made it necessary to examine the entire issue of relief supplies to the camps. Upon delivery, all such supplies were under the absolute control of the camp's political administration, which stockpiled and sold whatever it chose for the procurement of military materials and other needs. With food under their control, the leaders were able to elicit absolute obedience from their victims. That source of power - the control of food by criminals - should be immediately broken. Once food was withheld after notice had been given, the criminals might not be able to contain the population in the camps. That had worked elsewhere with the Rwandan refugees, and it could work in Zaire. Some pressure might be necessary before the criminals would give up; he was unaware of any cases in which terrorists had released their hostages without pressure.

66. Food withdrawal could be applied camp after camp, starting with the smaller camps. In the meantime, the large camps should be broken up into

units not exceeding 30,000 to 40,000 persons. The process could be preceded by a campaign involving a team of donor countries to send a strong message to the exiled population in preparation for repatriation. Rwanda stood ready to play its role, but considered camp closure to be a matter for the countries of asylum. It was pretentious and unrealistic ever to imagine that Rwandan exiles in Zairian camps would repatriate en masse when their present captors were still in control.

67. The ethnic cleansing in Kivu, which had resulted in over 20,000 Zairian refugees in Rwanda, was a matter of concern, especially as it did not seem to bother the Zairian authorities. A destructive hand-in-glove alliance had been formed between local Rwandan forces and genocidal, exiled Rwandan forces in carrying out the genocide. An attempt had been made by the representative of Zaire at the previous meeting to spread confusion and mislead international opinion by affirming that the ethnic cleansing was affecting the entire population, but his Government did not deem it useful to respond. The fact that the Zairians were utilizing the weakened forces committing genocide in Zaire for their short-term gains was a bitter and lamentable experience. It was a continuation of the genocide against the Tutsi population in the region, and unless the international community intervened, graver consequences would ensue. The genocide was being perpetrated by the same people who were being fed by the international community, and it was in the interest of the Zairian Government and their hosts to stop those unfortunate acts. The international community should act swiftly, before it was too late.

68. Mr. EVTUKH (Observer for Ukraine), drawing attention to the impact of what was a very serious problem in Ukraine's social, political and economic life, said that refugees were a new issue in Ukraine, which had faced its first refugee flows in 1988-1989, owing to the tragic developments in Azerbaijan, when several thousand Meshketian Turks from Uzbekistan had entered the country. Prior to 1992, the refugees had come mostly from the republics of the former Soviet Union. Now they came also from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Afghanistan and Africa, representing a variety of ethnicities in addition to the 100 ethnic minorities already living in Ukraine. Ukraine was a receiving country; there was no reason, such as ethnic conflict, for an outflow of refugees. At the same time it was a transit country, because for many refugees the primary destination was western Europe.

69. There were two groups of displaced persons in Ukraine who could not be legally classified as refugees: the 60,000 forced to leave their places of permanent settlement in Chechnya, and the 35,000 forced to leave their places of permanent settlement in Abkhazia. For those groups, special resolutions had been adopted by the Government to regulate their problems. In recent years, 200,000 Crimean Tatars had also been returning from deportation; their repatriation process was under way.

70. Those were specific features of the movement of people to, through and within Ukraine, but there was no universal method for treating the problems of the displaced persons. His Government was trying to solve the economic, political and ethnocultural problems of the displaced by drawing on the experience of other countries and the positive activities of international organizations, particularly UNHCR and the International Office for

Migration (IOM). The legislative basis for regulating the refugee problem included several laws, such as the Refugee Act, adopted in 1994. In view of the fact that large groups of displaced persons had become a stable element of society, other laws had been passed aimed at their integration and at the rehabilitation of deportees, asylum-seekers and the like.

71. The agreement between Ukraine and UNHCR, signed in Kiev in September 1996, had given fresh impetus to bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The two conferences that had taken place in April and May 1996 had considerably helped solve the problem of displaced persons in Ukraine. The United States, Switzerland, Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Greece, Canada, Turkey and other Governments had already made, or were currently making, contributions to solving the problem of refugees and deportees, especially in Crimea.

72. Mrs. KRASNOHORSKÁ (Observer for the Slovak Republic) said the geopolitical location and economic conditions of the Slovak Republic called for specific approaches to the issue of migration. Contemporary migration in central European countries was changing in character. Rather than passing through those countries, migrants were tending to remain there. While such migration had a positive impact on the development of society, it also led to increased crime and a radicalization of socio-economic conditions and of attitudes. The assistance of international organizations, and particularly UNHCR, was of great importance.

73. An organic component of the Slovak Republic's migration policy was to provide protection to refugees in accordance with recognized international instruments, in particular the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Fundamental principles of those instruments had been incorporated in the new law on refugees, which included provisions for positive identification of individuals in order to prevent potential criminal activities and repeated unjustified applications for asylum. The situation in that regard had stabilized, and approximately 300 people had applied for refugee status in 1996.

74. After setting up State facilities to deal with migration, the Slovak Republic was now able to devote greater attention to durable solutions. The new national programme was based on five principles: job opportunities, housing, education, social and health services and training in the Slovak language, and had been successful thanks to UNHCR, which had contributed approximately US$ 270,000 in 1996, primarily to provide housing for refugees. Cooperation between the Slovak authorities and NGOs in the integration of refugees in society was already excellent and was expected to expand.

75. From the onset of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the Slovak Republic had granted temporary protection to displaced persons, and the period of such protection had been extended until 31 December 1996. On 20 March 1996, the Slovak Republic had become the first country in Europe to organize the collective repatriation of a group of displaced Bosnians. In addition, it had cooperated with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in arranging the repatriation of individuals. Consequently, only about 300 of the original 1,800 people under temporary protection remained in Slovakia.

76. Mr. PHIPHACPHOMMACHANH (Observer for the Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that voluntary repatriation was the most realistic and appropriate durable solution to the refugee problem. His Government appreciated the contributions of UNHCR, the United Nations system and donor countries to humanitarian activities such as assistance to the victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters and to development programmes. UNHCR's work was of particular importance in Liberia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi, and also in Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia, where the situation was political in nature. Also important was the programme for the orderly return of Vietnamese non-refugees within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA).

77. His Government had affirmed since 1975 that Lao refugees who had left the country could return in dignity and safety any time they wished. To that end, it had concluded an agreement with UNHCR and the Government of Thailand on the voluntary repatriation from Thailand of Lao refugees. To date, over 23,000 people had returned. His Government had facilitated the departure of those selected for resettlement in another country and in no way hindered those wishing to settle in Thailand. Moreover, in September 1996, Thailand had hosted the eighth tripartite meeting with the Government of Thailand and UNHCR on the fate of the 6,000 Lao refugees in the Napho Repatriation Centre. During that meeting, it had been recommended that the Government of the United States of America, which had announced an end to its policy of accepting Lao refugees, should complete the immigration process as soon as possible.

78. Mr. VENERA (Observer for the Czech Republic) said that his Government was concerned to seek durable solutions in the form of the voluntary repatriation to and reintegration in the countries of origin or alternatively integration in the territory of the Czech Republic, with an emphasis on family reunion. In June 1996 the Czech Republic had taken the first concrete steps towards the voluntary repatriation of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina under its temporary protection, a total of 282 of whom had already returned home with allowances to help them settle in. Returnees who were unable to settle in their country of origin would be entitled to return to the Czech Republic in the first three months of their repatriation. The operation had been organized in close cooperation with UNHCR. The repatriation procedure was conducted in accordance with UNHCR recommendations and principles, under which voluntary and safe return of refugees and displaced persons was an integral element of the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Evidence of his country's appreciation of the importance of that process was to be seen in the direct development aid and financial contributions provided to the relevant organizations, including UNHCR, which played a pivotal role.

79. The repatriation would in all likelihood continue in 1997, and the Czech authorities were currently dealing with cases of Bosnian citizens under its protection who were unable or unwilling to return to their home country. The Government had decided to contribute a total of US$ 300,000 to the Trust Fund for Shelter Material in Bosnia and Herzegovina, half of which had been earmarked for use in the home regions of returnees and the remainder for direct supplies of commodities and services by Czech companies for the reconstruction of Sarajevo. An additional US$ 2 million had been spent by Czech NGOs on reconstruction programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

80. His country was now focusing on programmes for full integration of persons with refugee status. The State programme for refugee integration, based on cooperation with NGOs and funded from the State budget, was into its third year of successful operation. Moreover, the latest amendment to Czech refugee law encouraged the naturalization of refugees and would certainly facilitate full integration in society. It was also desirable to broaden the international exchange of information on voluntary repatriation and integration programmes, especially in the European countries. His delegation greatly valued the role played by UNHCR in the CIS Conference on refugees, which was a positive and tangible result of unique cooperation and coordination between UNHCR, IOM and OSCE, and he urged those organizations to move further in that direction. His country respected UNHCR's work in regard to statelessness and he wished to stress the cooperation between UNHCR and the Czech authorities on the issue of citizenship.

81. Ms. ISMAILOVA (Observer for the Kyrgyz Republic) said that the recent UNHCR reforms were welcome and she hoped that they would lead to more effective fulfilment of the Office's mandate. Kyrgyzstan had ratified that instrument, the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol in order to affirm its commitment to international law, human rights and democratic values and because it planned to use them as a basis for standard-setting and legislation aimed at strengthening the State system for dealing with problems related to migration to the Kyrgyz Republic. There were currently over 50,000 refugees in Kyrgyzstan, originating primarily in Tajikistan, Chechnya, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. UNHCR had carried out a clean water project, had provided coal to refugees and planned to open a school and provide support to a project aimed at offering additional jobs to refugees.

82. Kyrgyzstan faced problems related to the impact of refugees on its ecosystem and needed to reorganize its temporary reception centres. Since the country was still economically weak, it was difficult to provide all the necessary assistance to refugees. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan had, as yet, no immigration law. However, even without that legislative basis, it was providing social assistance to refugees, who were entitled to pensions, special allowances for large families, land grants for farmers and assistance with home construction. Kyrgyzstan had worked with UNHCR to strengthen its legal basis for migration and the acceptance of refugees. UNHCR and international organizations and donors were also assisting the country in drawing up its 1997 budget.

83. With regard to long-term solutions, it was essential to develop preventive strategies and provide receiving countries with timely assistance in the social integration of refugees and subsequent measures for return to their countries of origin. She wished to thank UNHCR for its work in central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan, and hoped that it would in the future provide assistance with the problem of unemployed refugees in host countries.

84. Mr. MADEY (Observer for Croatia) said that his Government was committed to the return of all persons to their places of origin and was investing great efforts and resources to rebuild areas of the country from which the displaced persons had been expelled. However, assistance and foreign investment were greatly needed. The main coordination of all major return activities should

remain, as stipulated in the Dayton Agreements, with UNHCR. None of the 80,000 non-Serbs expelled in 1991 from the Croatian Danubian Area, currently under the governance of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES), had returned, primarily because of resistance and obstruction by the local Serbian population. Unfortunately, even one-day visits to local cemeteries had been stopped. Such practices understandably increased the anger of refugees. Croatia regretted the reluctance of UNHCR and UNTAES to proceed at a quicker pace.

85. Plainly, a massive return would not be possible before the full establishment of Croatian authority in the area. An undue extension of the UNTAES mandate could be counter-productive, slowing down the peace process and the return of refugees and thereby directly causing increased tensions between the displaced and the local inhabitants. A group of extremists who did not represent the prevailing views of residents of the area should not be allowed to dictate political events. In that context the organization of local elections had important implications. The Parliament of Croatia had set a deadline of 15 January 1997 for the termination of the UNTAES mandate and, consequently, holding the local elections a month before that. Preparations for voting had already begun and his Government believed that the elections in Eastern Slavonia could be even more successfully organized and held by 15 December. UNHCR should firmly pursue its own plans to start the return to the Croatian Danubian Area, as that peaceful reintegration was soon likely to become one of the few entirely successful United Nations missions.

86. Croatia still hosted some 180,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to 140,000 of its own displaced persons, which represented an enormous burden. More efforts should be invested in the present phase to the return of refugees to the so-called "majority areas", where there were still many problems.

87. Implementation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreements was slow and frustrating. Croatia therefore welcomed UNHCR's initiative to proceed with a regional plan for durable solutions. As such a plan was expected to expand Annex 7 in scope and time, the same responsibilities for all of the actors concerned must be specified. The establishment of an expert group to develop the plan would also be welcome. It would also be useful for UNHCR to use the knowledge of persons in Croatia who had worked most directly with refugees, sometimes in the harshest of conditions.

88. Mr. RODRIGUES (Observer for Mozambique) said his country was grateful for the international community's prompt response to an appeal for support during the last stage of the UNHCR programme in Mozambique, a response that had made possible the implementation of quick impact projects (QIP) for the settlement of returnees. The refugee repatriation and resettlement programme in Mozambique had officially ended in July 1996, at which time that had been clearly understood by the Government, donors, United Nations agencies, NGOs and other actors that significant efforts were still required as Mozambique fully entered the development phase. On the social and economic front, many challenges remained, including the reintegration in civil life of demobilized soldiers and the land-mine problem. His Government was determined to face those challenges with the help of the international community.

89. By combining the repatriation and resettlement processes, UNHCR had laid the foundations for smoother reintegration of refugees and created the conditions for building a bridge between humanitarian assistance and sustainable human development. Many factors had contributed to the results of that operation, which had enabled approximately 1.7 million Mozambicans to return safely and voluntarily to their places of origin or choice. Among those factors were the successful implementation of the General Peace Agreement, signed in October 1992; the establishment of a Government resettlement strategy and the early involvement of all parties concerned; the immediate and generous response of the international community; the coordination between the Government, UNHCR, other United Nations agencies and civil society throughout the process; and the excellent facilities extended to Mozambican refugees by the Governments of Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

90. One of the lessons learned from that process had been the vital role of coordination at every stage of the process among all the actors involved. In that regard, he welcomed the UNHCR regional approach, which should contribute to the pursuit and implementation of durable solutions to the refugee problem. Particularly welcome was the Memorandum of Understanding recently signed by UNHCR and the Southern African Development Committee (SADC), the goal of which was to establish a framework for cooperation in dealing with refugees, forced population and migratory movements and the search for ways of addressing the root causes of those movements in southern Africa. Mozambique supported UNHCR's efforts to assist women and children, who were particularly affected by armed conflict and hoped that the report being prepared under the guidance of Ms. Graça Machel would draw international attention to the fate of child victims of such conflicts. Despite the shaky economic situation, his Government was prepared to continue to give shelter to those who had already crossed its borders in search of protection and to contribute to the search for solutions to the conflicts that continued to cause a massive exodus of populations.

91. Mr. ZACKHEOS (Cyprus) said that the Vienna Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights had emphasized the importance of giving special attention to finding lasting solutions to refugee problems. While global refugee numbers had decreased in 1996, a number of the world's major refugee situations remained intractable. The situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa called for urgent action and he endorsed the High Commissioner's proposal for a regional meeting of the parties concerned to seek a lasting solution. The situation of Afghan, Somali and Liberian refugees was also difficult, but the success of the CIREFCA and CAP process and the completion of repatriation in Mozambique showed that the picture was not completely negative. As to Bosnia, the provisions of the Dayton Agreements for the return of refugees and displaced persons were of vital importance and cooperation with UNHCR was needed in the repatriation process.

92. In addition to internal armed conflicts, one main cause of displacement was the aggression of one State against another, as was the case in Cyprus. Efforts should therefore aim at preventive action to avoid displacement and its attendant traumas. Another reason for displacement was fear caused by repressive or undemocratic regimes. Good government and respect for the rule of law should therefore be the purpose of domestic policies. Effectively

resolving global economic inequalities would also go a long way towards preventing immigration associated with lack of economic opportunity at home. Also, the world must learn to predict and improve its management of natural calamities.

93. The magnitude of the refugee problem called for concerted local, regional and international efforts and for early warning and strong preventive measures. States had an obligation to respect the Charter of the United Nations and refrain from the threat or use of force against other States and to comply with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The international community must not condone armed conflict and foreign aggression. People indicted by international criminal tribunals should be excluded from refugee status, for which reason his delegation supported the High Commissioner's recent initiative concerning the 20 Rwandans accused of war crimes.

94. Humanitarian aid should be urgently provided, and Governments and armed groups should refrain from placing obstacles in the way of international humanitarian operations. Displaced persons should be trained in new skills pending their return to their homes, and special programmes should aim at alleviating the pain and suffering of vulnerable groups. International humanitarian organizations must also improve their effectiveness, coordination and ability to respond to emergencies.

95. In Cyprus, the question of displaced persons, numbering one third of the population, as a result of the Turkish invasion and the continuing occupation, was a matter of the utmost concern. The case of Cyprus vividly demonstrated that population displacement resulted in gross violations of human rights, including forcible eviction from homes and land, ill-treatment and violation of freedom of movement and resettlement, the right to shelter and the right to adequate living conditions. Particularly cruel was the denial of the right to family reunification. Cyprus had raised the issue of violations of human rights of the persons displaced in Cyprus in various forums and a number of decisions and resolutions had been adopted. In raising the matter it was seriously interested in a peaceful, viable and functional settlement of the Cyprus problem based on United Nations resolutions. In that connection, his delegation greatly appreciated UNHCR's continuing coordination role in the programme of humanitarian assistance to displaced persons in Cyprus, and was also grateful to the United States, which was financing the programme through an annual grant of US$ 10 million.

96. Mr. THINLEY (Observer for Bhutan) said that the Nepalese Minister for Foreign Affairs had drawn attention to the large number of Nepalese currently in refugee camps in Nepal, all claiming to be refugees from Bhutan. Although the Foreign Minister had referred to those people as Bhutanese refugees, their origin and status was a matter under discussion between Bhutan and Nepal and the problem was far more complex than had been stated. The two countries had geographical similarities, but there were major economic, demographic and environmental differences between them. The mountain environment of Nepal was unable to support its rapidly growing population of 22,000,000 people, and some 400,000 Nepalese per year left to seek a better livelihood across the open border with India. Twelve million ethnic Nepalese already lived in India, most of them immediately across Bhutan's porous southern border.

Bhutan, on the other hand, was far smaller than Nepal, and with a population of only 600,000 people and by far the largest ratio of land to people in southern Asia. For Bhutan, which had always been an island of peace and economic opportunity, the increasingly desperate waves of illegal Nepalese immigrants posed a threat to the survival of its people in the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

97. Bhutan already had an ethnic Nepalese minority, who had been granted Bhutanese citizenship in 1958 and played an active role in the country while maintaining their own culture and traditions. Bhutan was not against the Nepalese, but only against the relentless tide of illegal Nepalese immigrants. The problem had begun in August 1991, when the Nepalese Government had sought external assistance in dealing with 234 people who had arrived in Nepal claiming to be Bhutanese refugees. By December of that year, the number of refugees had risen to 6,000. The King of Bhutan had asked the Prime Minister of Nepal not to encourage people to come for what amounted to free handouts. However, the Prime Minister had felt unable to comply with that request for fear of criticism from Nepalese political parties. Many illegal immigrants, Nepalese who had been working in Bhutan as contractual labourers, and poor Nepalese from neighbouring areas had begun to congregate in refugee camps to obtain the free food, shelter, health, education and other facilities provided by international agencies. Almost all of those now in Nepalese refugee camps had arrived before the introduction of standard screening procedures at the Nepalese border in June 1993. Previously, it had been necessary only to claim Bhutanese refugee status to obtain entry to those camps and, in that regard, it was interesting to note that, during the latest round of bilateral negotiations, Nepal had taken the position that verification of the nationalities of the people in the refugee camps should be based on their own statements.

98. The first bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal had been held in July 1993. It had been decided to establish a Ministerial Joint Committee responsible for determining the categories of people claiming to have come from Bhutan, establishing the positions of the two Governments on each of those categories and arriving at a mutually acceptable agreement as a basis for resolving the problem. To date, the Committee had held seven meetings and, contrary to the general impression, had made considerable progress, as the Foreign Minister of Nepal had noted the previous day. Both sides had agreed that there were four categories of people in the refugee camps: bona-fide Bhutanese if they had been forcibly evicted from the country; Bhutanese who had emigrated from Bhutan; Bhutanese who had committed criminal acts; and non-Bhutanese. A joint team had been set up to verify the classification of people in the four agreed categories, and much progress had been made in harmonizing the positions of the two Governments. A text of those positions had been finalized, and the names of future members of the joint verification team had been exchanged. However, it had been impossible to reach final agreement because of last-minute political considerations affecting the Nepalese members of the Committee.

99. The Foreign Minister of Nepal had said that his country wanted the refugees to be allowed to return in safety and dignity. However, the whole purpose of the bilateral talks was to determine who, if anyone, was a genuine refugee from Bhutan. His Government's position on that issue had always been

very clear. Even before the establishment of the Ministerial Joint Committee, the Royal Government of Bhutan had accepted full responsibility for any Bhutanese who might have been forcibly evicted, and a royal edict had been issued as a reminder that it was a punishable offence to forcibly evict a Bhutanese citizen. As a result of several concessions made by his Government, the bilateral negotiations had brought the two countries close to beginning joint verification in the field and, had it not been for the political instability in Nepal and consequent changes in the country's Government, the Committee's members and the political considerations of each successive Government, those efforts would already have yielded a solution.

100. The two Governments could not seek a solution through both bilateral negotiation and international intervention. Bhutan felt that, in view of the goodwill and friendship that had always existed between the two countries, every effort should be made to resolve the problem through dialogue. His Government was ready to continue to work with Nepal to find a rapid, just and durable solution and had already extended an invitation to Nepal for the next round of talks.

The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.